

- Write little stories beside the photographs in family albums. Turn the albums into personal "family readers".
- Encourage letter-writing: fan letters, thank-you letters, letters of enquiry. Encourage your children to keep diaries.
- Play at writing commercials for new and fantastic products or have your children write out and learn the words of favourite recordings. Getting "pop" songs down on paper from listening is one form of taking dictation.
- Play at making up new headlines by cutting out words from the newspaper.
- Play with riddles, nursery rhymes, nonsense verse, and tongue-twisters such as "Peter Piper picked a peck of . . ."
- Play word games like *spill-and-spell*, *scrabble*, *lexicon*, or *word bingo*. (You can make up your own cards for bingo by ruling sheets of paper into 9, 16, or 25 squares, depending upon the age of the children.) In the squares, print letters or words that your children are learning to recognize, spell, or read.

#### Play listening games

- On the bus, or sitting in the backyard, have your children close their eyes and listen. What do they hear? Have them discuss it.
- Members of the family sit around. One is blindfolded. Another member speaks in a disguised voice. The blindfolded child must guess who has spoken.
- One person sits behind a screen and makes a noise, such as working a pair of scissors or shaking a can of dried beans. The other players try to guess what he or she has done.
- Tap out a rhythm. Have your children repeat it and guess what rhyme or song has the same rhythm. To begin with, try the rhythms of well-known nursery rhymes.

You can help your children immensely by following any or all of these tips, but the most important thing that you can do is to set a good example. If it's obvious to your children that you enjoy reading and writing, there's a good chance that they will too. Research has shown that a positive parental attitude toward learning is one of the most important factors affecting children's progress.

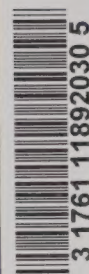
If your children are experiencing difficulties with reading and writing, we suggest you discuss the problem with their teachers. General information on reading and writing may also be obtained by contacting one of the nine regional offices of the Ontario Ministry of Education. Regional offices of the Ministry are located in the following cities:

Northwestern Ontario:  
Thunder Bay (475-1581)  
Midnorthern Ontario:  
Sudbury (566-3480)  
Northeastern Ontario:  
North Bay (474-7210)  
Western Ontario:  
London (472-1440)  
Midwestern Ontario:  
Waterloo (885-0440)  
Niagara:  
St. Catharines (684-1123)  
Central Ontario:  
Willowdale (Toronto 491-0330)  
Eastern Ontario:  
Kingston (546-2641)  
Ottawa Valley:  
Ottawa (225-2230)



Ministry  
of  
Education

Thomas L. Wells  
Minister



## Reading and Writing: Helping Your Child Improve

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All parents want the best for their children. They want them to master those basic skills, such as reading and writing, upon which so much of the children's future will depend. Many parents say, "I want to help my children now and reduce the possibility of their failing in school. What can I do to support the reading and writing skills they're acquiring in the classroom?"

Here are some answers to that question—some measures that you, as a parent, can take.

### **Be a model for your children**

- Keep in touch with your children's teachers. Ask for advice on how to support their classroom activities.

*Show your children that you think learning is important.*

- Demonstrate to your children that reading is a pleasurable experience—that you like to read.
- Read to your children often. Ask them to read to you.
- Have dictionaries of varying levels of difficulty in the house. Let your children see that you use one.
- Keep plenty of easy reading of all kinds around the house. Reading is like any other skill, such as playing a piano or figure skating; it comes with practice. A *child learns to read by reading*. Schedule some quiet family reading time each day.

### **As you go about your daily work**

- Practice 'kitchen reading' (words on food packages and in recipes) together.
- Have your children find numbers in the telephone book for you. Let *their* fingers do the walking through the yellow pages.
- Have them use the index in catalogues and then find out how much different items would cost.
- Before switching on the television set, have your children read the program schedule and choose what they most want to see.
- Don't give all instructions verbally. Write your children notes. Ask them to write notes to you. Have a magnetic bulletin board on your refrigerator door or kitchen wall. Write notes about what chores the

children have to do or what they may or may not eat or drink. Encourage them to write shopping reminders for you. Reading and writing activities that are meaningful to children are more likely to produce results than drills to which they can't relate.

- Have a place where your children can paint and crayon or cut-and-paste without having to worry about making a mess. It will take them a while to develop the co-ordination required to make small letters. Give them large sheets of paper to work with at first so that they'll have space for large printing.

• Reading involves more than sounding out words or letters. It requires comprehension and understanding. Talk with your children as much as you can, and as you do, try to *extend* their vocabulary. A young child helping his mother prepare a salad may ask, "Do we put the dressing on now?" If the parent simply answers, "no," further conversation is discouraged. If the parent repeats what the child has said and responds, "No, we do not put the dressing on now," the child at least knows that his or her original question was phrased correctly. The parent who wants to *extend* the child's vocabulary might add, "It's too soon to put the dressing on. The lettuce would become saturated with the dressing and lose its crispness."

- As you travel about with your children, discuss mutual experiences. These experiences and discussions about them will form the basis of the children's understanding of what they read.

### **Reading, writing, or playing together**

- If your children stumble over more than 5-10 words in a hundred, you can assume that the material is too difficult. Encourage them to read a great deal of easy material, so that the habits of a good reader—such as skimming across a page—are acquired. Children who stumble over every word cannot read for meaning; information will be forgotten as quickly as it's acquired.
- When you play together with letters or words, help your children see significant differences between one letter and another or between one word and another. It is just as easy for a child to distinguish between two words like *cat* and *bat* as it is to distinguish between *c* and *b*. Play with whole words where possible.

- There should be no penalties imposed for making mistakes. To become fluent, children must be prepared to hazard responses and risk mistakes. Reading and writing are interwoven. Writing and illustrating their own story books stimulate children's imaginations and provides continuous motivation for practising reading and writing skills. Start a book entitled "All About Me." Begin with a picture of the child. Print a sentence or two beneath it, such as "This is me. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I was born on \_\_\_\_\_. My mother's name is \_\_\_\_\_."

• Have your children cut pictures out of magazines—pictures of hockey players or musicians or dancers, according to their fancy. A photograph of your child's face may then be pasted over that of the person in the picture. If your child isn't able to do so yet, you should print as he directs: "This is me when I grow up. I want to be a hockey star. I will play for the Maple Leafs." Gradually, the child creates a personal book that can be read aloud to the family. It is important that the vocabulary be that of the child.

- Examine photographs and works of art with your children. Discuss what they see. Extend the part of their vocabulary that deals with shape, colour, and form.

- Have your children sort collections of objects by size, shape, colour, and texture.

• Use home-made puppets. Have your children dramatize stories they have read. They can write scripts and put on their own shows, but they need an audience—you!

- Encourage your children to write stories about the pictures they have drawn.

• Have your children guess what you are writing as you trace out letters with your fingers on their backs. Have them write words with their fingers in a sandbox. Have them trace over letters or words that you have written in the sand.

- Keep a family scrapbook of interesting pictures collected from newspapers or magazines. Have your children write comments.